

Cluster Leader Electronic Message
A Special Edition for High School Writing Cluster Leaders
September 12, 2006

Cluster Leaders,

During summer training and into the fall we have been discussing upcoming writing changes as approved by the Kentucky Board of Education. Since the new school year has begun, we have been answering many more questions. I'm writing to clarify for everyone the answers to the common questions we have been receiving about the changes in the assessment design.

The three areas we've received the most questions about are the on-demand test, reflective writing and the analytical/technical piece.

On-demand Assessment—Clarification

- This November, all 12th grade students will participate in the On-demand assessment. The assessment will consist of two prompts—one direct and one field-tested prompt. This year, the direct prompt is 90 minutes with however much time the student needs to finish (as it has been in years past); field-tested prompt will be 60 minutes with 60 minutes of extra time if the student needs it (unless a student has an IEP or 504 Plan that states he/she receives extra time).
- For 2006-2007 only—as the old system is phasing out and the new phasing in—the part of the writing index that is on-demand (50%) will come from the direct prompt.
- The direct prompt will be the same as it has been in the past. Students will be given a choice of two tasks, and they may choose the task they would like to respond to. This task will have the form assigned in the prompt as well as the audience and purpose. The responses will be scored holistically. That will end the old system.
- Each senior will also receive a field-tested prompt which will provide important test data, so that in 2007-2008, when both prompts in the OD assessment are firmly in accountability, there will be statistical data to support the new design.
- The field-tested prompts (this November) that will provide this data will be either a passage-based prompt or another direct prompt with a choice of two logical forms provided in the prompt along with the audience and purpose. The only difference in this new direct prompt from the “old” direct prompt is that students will have that choice of forms. The responses will be scored analytically.
- In 2007-2008, the part of the writing index that is on demand (50%) will be calculated with each of these prompts counting 1/2 of the 50%.

Passage-based prompts

Like the name indicates the passage-based prompts will ask students to draw, in part, on a passage they are provided for their response. This is a traditional type of activity in most language arts classes.

Students will be given a short (1/2-3/4 page) non-fiction passage and a writing task. The writing task will be set up like the direct prompt except that it will ask students to draw on information from the passage.

This prompt isn't intended to be a reading test. The passage simply provides students equal information on which to draw for their response.

Preparing for Passage-based prompts

Because the field test hasn't been completed yet, there are no released samples or student samples of this type of prompt. After the test, released items and samples will be made available to all teachers.

To prepare students for what they will see if they receive a passage-based prompt as the second prompt, have them practice writing in response to tasks that require the student to use information from short passages.

You might find short passages in the newspaper or in magazines. Then, direct students to read the passage and draw on the information for the task you provide. This task is similar to the direct prompt in that it will provide the audience, purpose, and a choice of two logical forms.

Example:

Students have been presented with an editorial that argues for a smoking ban in public places. It gives facts, background, statistics, etc. The students will read the editorial and then complete the task. They should be able to draw on the information in the passage. The task might read something like this:

Based on what you read in the passage about the smoking ban in public places, take a stand on the issue and write an editorial or an article to persuade your town council to agree with your point of view.

Make certain your prompts are constructed correctly in that you ask students to narrate for a purpose, inform or persuade to a logical audience in one of the OD forms: letter, article, speech, editorial.

Reflective Writing

I have attached a file that contains some materials to help you continue to develop reflective writing. A planning map and a reflective sample are parts of the packet. You will receive more information as the handbook comes out. I think this will help teachers better understand how the piece should be developed for the portfolio.

Soon, we will have reflective writing materials archived on the web for you as well (and we will let you know when and where via a CLEM).

Analytical Writing

Please find KDE materials [at this page](#). We will continue to archive samples on this page. I have a new sample set that should be available on this page very soon.

Lee Ann Hager, NBCT
High School Writing Consultant
Kentucky Department of Education

Cluster Leaders,

To help you help students with the reflective writing category, I am including some information that I think you will find beneficial. I've also included a reflective sample (more to come via the web) and a planning map that might help the students organize for reflecting on literacy growth. I hope it's helpful to you.

Lee Ann

Reflective Writing

The new Program of Studies and Core Content for Assessment describe the goals of reflective writing:

"Students will analyze and communicate reflectively about literacy goals."

Program of Studies

In Reflective Writing, students will

- evaluate personal progress toward meeting goals in literacy skills
- develop the connection between literacy skills (reading and writing) and understanding of content knowledge
- describe their own literacy skills, strategies, processes or areas of growth
- analyze own decisions about literacy goals
- evaluate own strengths and areas for growth
- support claims about self

Core Content for Assessment 4.1

In **no way** is this Core Content 4.1 a checklist for students. The reflective piece might address some of these indicators, but in no way could the piece address them all and remained focused. Because students should be writing reflectively in many situations, they will meet these indicators differently.

What is the purpose for the reflective piece in the Writing Assessment Portfolio?

The purpose of the reflective piece is for students to analyze their growth as writers through the "lens" of literacy growth and goals. Given that purpose, students may focus the pieces many ways.

The **focus** is the way a writer achieves the **purpose**.

Purpose and focus work similarly in all categories of writing, so perhaps this will be easier to understand by looking at a category with which all teachers are very familiar—personal writing—and making the same connection with reflective writing.

Think about it like this:

In personal writing, a student may have as his purpose to analyze the significance of a relationship, let's say, with his grandmother. While that is his purpose, he may focus the piece in many ways.

- He might focus on a particular summer he spent with his grandmother that was particularly special.
- He might look at the relationship through the “lens” of a Thanksgiving dinner she prepared for the family and then, through the detail and discussion at the dinner table, show how this relationship was so special.
- He might focus on that relationship by showing in the piece how supportive his grandmother was at different points in his life.

Each of these descriptions of ways to focus would still help the student fulfill the same purpose. The piece would be as individual and unique as the student himself. Reflective writing works the same way.

Thus, the focus is the way a writer achieves his purpose.

In a reflective piece for the portfolio, a student may want to analyze his literacy growth and goals (purpose), but he may **achieve** that purpose in myriad ways.

Focusing in Reflective Writing to Analyze Growth in Writing

Possible scenarios:

A student writer might analyze his growth as a writer by focusing on a particular learning experience that improved his literacy.

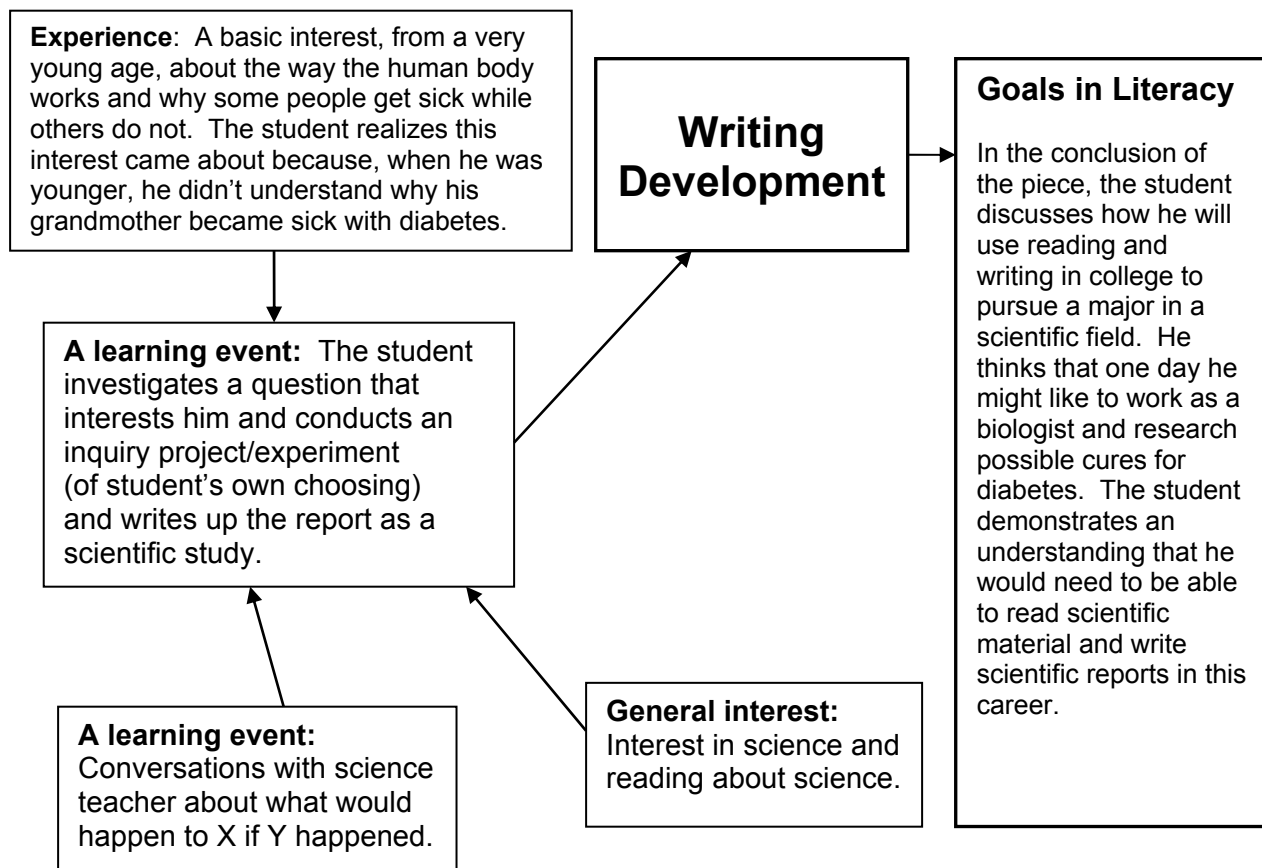
- For example, he might analyze the inquiry process he went through to write the analytical lab report he included in his portfolio. The piece would be very individual and unique to the student.
- A student might, instead, talk about how she developed in writing through an interest in reading. Perhaps as a child she read every Nancy Drew mystery available. She noticed that as she grew up, the reading experiences influenced her writing as she liked to write stories that were mysterious. This sparked her interest in writing (and thus reinforced the interest in reading), and, as she grew, her writing growth is evident in the mystery story she included in her portfolio. She analyzes how this all came together.
- As a third example—same purpose, to analyze growth as a writer through literacy—a student might recognize the importance a particular teacher played in his growth. He writes either a personal essay showing how this happened—how the learning experiences he had while in that teacher’s class helped make him the writer he is today. Or, he might write a letter to that teacher, discussing particular learning experiences that really made an impression on him.

In any of these examples, the purpose is the same. The focus is different and provides a way for the writer to achieve his/her purpose.

To accomplish the purpose of reflecting on writing development (by way of literacy growth and goals), a student may describe himself/herself as a reader, writer and learner and examine the significance of the related experiences. The reflective piece should be as individual as the students. Teachers should not use a checklist of “things to include” in a reflective piece as this practice decreases ownership and authenticity in the students’ writing.

The diagram below is **theoretical**. The flowchart would be different for every student. However, it illustrates how specific learning and literacy experiences might impact writing development, and thus, cause the student to consider goals for the future.

Sample mapping exercise for reflective writing**



In this example, the student is organizing for a reflective piece about his writing development through literacy experiences. He sees several experiences that led to a particular learning event (his inquiry project in science class). In the piece itself, he would connect these experiences to his writing development. According to the map in his conclusion, the student might discuss how he will use reading and writing in college to pursue a major in a science field. He thinks he may would one day like to work as a chemist and do research on the cure for diabetes. The student demonstrates an understanding that he would need to be able to read scientific material and write scientific reports.

****A template is attached that you might use with your students to “map” literacy growth.**

Common Concerns about the Reflective Piece in the Writing Assessment Portfolio

- This piece may come from a language arts class, but it might also be developed in a content area class. It doesn't have to be specifically a language arts piece, particularly if it developed as a result of a literacy experience in that content. If it were developed in a content area class, it would count as a content area piece.
- In the reflective piece for the portfolio, a student might refer to a piece included in his portfolio as an example to support his reflection, but there is **no need to refer to all pieces**. Likewise, a student may choose not to refer directly to any piece and look at the collection as a whole to reflect on literacy development.
- If students' reflective pieces are unique as the students are individually, the reflective pieces are probably on target, and the students are reflecting on their own personal writing and literacy growth.
- If all of the reflective pieces seem to sound alike, students are not doing the proper kind of thinking and analysis the reflective piece calls for. This would not make a portfolio incomplete, but the piece would probably not score very well.
- There is not one "right" way to write this piece. It will vary from student to student; however, there are several characteristics that show strong reflection in writing.

A strong reflective piece would, most likely, illustrate many, if not all, of these characteristics:

- Demonstrates specific literacy experiences that show impact/growth in writing.
- Demonstrates significance of literacy experiences through insightful analysis of learning events.
- Targets a specific audience and shows careful consideration of audience's needs to clearly communicate the purpose of the piece.
- Demonstrates careful idea development and makes connections to writing by way of literacy growth experiences.
- Demonstrates clear organization with insightful connections through analysis and reflection.
- Demonstrates narration of experience for the transactive purpose of analyzing growth in literacy to show impact on writing and learning (may narrate an event for the transactive purpose of informing)
- Demonstrates careful choice of form given purpose and audience.
- Is very individual to the student and his/her learning experiences.
- Demonstrates student clearly understands his/her literacy goals.

Saturday, March 11, 2000

Dear Reader,

Upon my father's desk is perched a photograph taken about ten years ago. It is a picture of me, scrawny, frizzy-haired, and grinning toothlessly with pride in my creation: a red sweatshirt I'd decorated in art class with the crudely formed letters of my name showing through a whirlwind of colorful splatters. My art was somewhat characteristic of my writing at the time. Each could express simple ideas but on the whole was relatively simple, unstructured, and unoriginal.

Like most young scholars, the quality of my writing was always just a few steps behind that of my reading, and as the difficulty of my reading progressed, my writing ability improved proportionally. By second grade, I was pouring over *Sweet Valley* books, and in third grade I read my first L.M. Montgomery novel *Anne of Green Gables*, both of which became instant and hapless addictions. I lost nearly three years of valuable reading time to such worthless serials and sentimental Victorian novels about delightfully rebellious Canadian orphan girls. During this time, my writing showed little improvement. I gained absolutely nothing from *Sweet Valley Twins*, and besides teaching me to write complex sentences (which did at least win me the exuberant praise of my elementary school teachers), L.M. Montgomery probably did me more harm than good. Even now I battle verbosity, a malady I am certain grew from overdosing on flowery Victorian literature at an early age.

Through elementary school, my writing was bland, my stories like faded chalk drawings made with only a few pale pastels. Like the tales I read, they were pretty but lacked both meaning and life. Fortunately, Tom Sawyer and Bilbo Baggins came to the rescue, hoisting me from my rut of girlie fiction. Without my realizing it, in expanding my reading list, I was adding colors to my palette. My style was finally showing some progress. My improvements were checked though by the simple fact that they were unconscious. I had never in my reading or my own writing questioned what separated the good from the bad. I was completely oblivious to technique. I knew how to choose fancy words, or mix my colors, but when it came to putting them on paper, I used about as much precision as Jackson Pollock. If the effect produced was pleasing, it was largely by chance.

In about the eighth or ninth grade, my father gave me a copy of *The Elements of Style*. This was like handing a painter a new set of brushes of all different shapes and sizes: large wash brushes for covering a lot of area all at once, fan-shaped brushes for painting wild sprays of color, and extra slender brushes for fine detailing. For the first time, I began

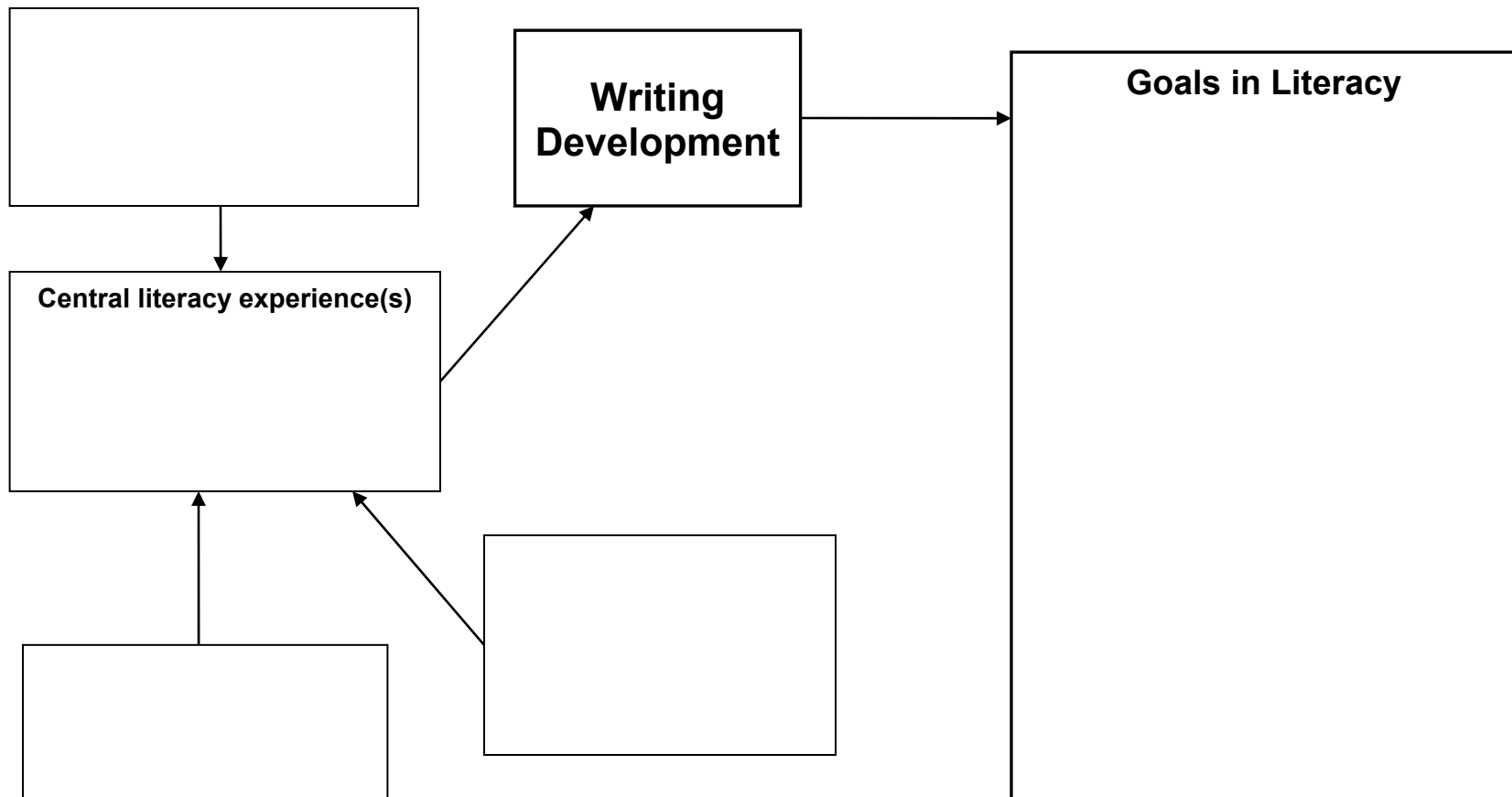
to examine why writers make certain decisions about diction, syntax, organization, and the other "elements of style." As I looked for how I could improve my own writing using similar techniques, my scatterings of words and phrases began to show some structure and planning. There was reason behind the choice and placement of each word, phrase, clause, and paragraph. With my new set of brushes, I could craft with more clarity what I wished to express.

As my reading list grew through the next three years to include such complex works as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Beloved*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I strove to make my own writing as vibrant and original, though I was usually discomfited with the result. I experimented some with symbolism and interesting analogies. By reading more poetry, I learned the importance of economy and began to exercise it in my prose.

My writing gradually advanced to the level of a painting by one of the Realists, a Corot or a Millet, for example. There is now definite structure to my writing, and my ideas are clear, but their expression still lacks the character, vivacity, and originality of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Perhaps though, reading does not help these things. Character and originality might be elements only life experience can supply, in which case, chance alone governs how my writing will grow. For now, I can only paint away at the evolving mural of my life and wonder where it will take me next.

Sincerely,

Reflective Writing for the Portfolio: Mapping Literacy Experiences



****Students may add or remove boxes to/from this diagram as needed to show their own learning experiences and goals. This flowchart is intended to help students see how their individual experiences impact writing development and literacy growth and goals.**